



Dear Parents & Guardians,

We're looking forward to another great year of Best Buddies at Upper Merion High School! For those who may not be aware, Best Buddies is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, and inclusive living for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Our School Friendship Programs like the one at Upper Merion, develop a more inclusive school community by creating one-to-one friendship matches between students with IDD and students without IDD, bridging the social gap that can often exist within our schools and communities.

As we get the year started, we would like to provide you with an overview of the various roles that exist within the Best Buddies Chapter at your school:

- **Buddy:** an Upper Merion High School student with an intellectual or developmental disability matched in a one-to-one friendship.
- **Peer buddy:** an Upper Merion High School student without a disability matched in a one-to-one friendship.
- **Special Education Advisor:** a school staff member who works within the Special Education classroom and oversees the Upper Merion High School chapter of Best Buddies by providing guidance to the buddies involved in the program and working closely with the Chapter President, officers and buddies to ensure all matches and activities are successful.
- **Assistant Advisor:** a school staff member who helps to oversee the Upper Merion High School chapter of Best Buddies and provides guidance and leadership to the chapter and works closely with the Chapter President, officers and peer buddies to ensure all matches and activities are successful.

Expectations for 1:1 Friendships:

Students engaged in a friendship match are expected to see each other in person at least twice a month and communicate (phone, email, social media) on a weekly basis. These relationships should be 50/50 in the sense that each individual within the friendship has a responsibility to keep up communications, help in planning hang outs, pay their own way and secure their own transportation. This helps to build important life skills that will benefit participants for years to come. It is important to note that the peer buddy role is **not** that of a care giver or a mentor. Best Buddies learn and grow from each other and are true peers in every sense of the word. As with any friendship, boundaries are important and should be established early on to ensure that both participants are comfortable with the dynamics in their relationship. Offering to treat one's friend to an ice cream cone or picking up one's buddy on the way to an activity is up to the discretion of each individual. A healthy friendship is one where balance exists and both parties contribute equally.

We appreciate your efforts to support such friendships to form at Upper Merion and know that by doing so, you and your student are creating a more inclusive community for us all! Thank you for your support. If you have questions relating to your specific chapter, please feel free to get in touch with the advisors, Gail Ward and Victoria Burke. If you would like to learn more about Best Buddies Pennsylvania, please reach out to our staff using the contact information below.

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